



## Letter from the Editor:

Brothers and Sisters!

Please enjoy this special issue of the Right2Vote Report commemorating this month of Black August. Within this report you find coverage from the second round of Debates, updates on California's ACA6, Free the Vote Act and the calendar of events for this month into the first weeks of September. Please note that there is an [address change from Seattle to Detroit](#). Sawarimi is moving to Motor City and so is the production of this newsletter so please address all mail for myself and the Right2Vote Report to:

P.O. Box #2278  
Detroit, Michigan 48202

The Seattle mailbox will be open until September and I have submitted a mail forwarding request so as not to lose any items that may have been mailed prior to receiving this notice. Please note that the return address on this issue has also been updated to reflect this change.

We are in the midst of a season of transition. Changes are happening all over the place, changes in location, changes in administration, changes in the awareness of prisoners' human rights. Sex trafficking victim, Cyntoia Brown, was released from the Tennessee Prison for Women on August 7th and on that same day outspoken writer and activist Comrade Malik was granted parole, to both I send a heart filled congratulatory shout! Its apparent that with enough pressure applied to the joints of this monstrous system, the force of passion outweighs punitivity. A win requires organization and focus, where do we focus our energy when millions are in need?

This system thrives on the lack of oversight on its operations and the forced silence on its victims. We disrupt both of these, groups like the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee provide oversight of prisons where its members are incarcerated, supporting organized actions like that of hunger strikers at Scotland Correctional Institution in Laurinburg, N.C., that began on July 31, 2019. The silence of incarcerated voices is alleviated by the articles, poetry, artwork, books, songs and plethora of material that individuals create while incarcerated. It is your responsibility to produce in whatever form is most comfortable for you. I receive artwork and articles from incarcerated citizens all over the country and unlike many in this work I read and save them all. Every piece is organized and filed appropriately so that it can be found and included in relevant productions. No voice is left behind, so keep producing!

In Solidarity,  
Amani Sawarimi  
@Sawarimi

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These are the NATIONAL DEMANDS of the men and women in federal, immigration and state prisons:

- 1.Immediate improvements to the conditions of prisons and prison policies that recognize the humanity of imprisoned men and women.
- 2.An immediate end to prison slavery. All persons imprisoned in any place of detention under United States jurisdiction must be paid the prevailing wage in their state or territory for their labor.
- 3.Rescission of the Prison Litigation Reform Act, allowing imprisoned humans a proper channel to address grievances and violations of their rights.
- 4.Rescission of the Truth in Sentencing Act and the Sentencing Reform Act so that imprisoned humans have a possibility of rehabilitation and parole. No human shall be sentenced to death by incarceration or serve any sentence without the possibility of parole.
- 5.An immediate end to the racial overcharging, over-sentencing and parole denials of Black and brown humans. Black humans shall no longer be denied parole because the victim of the crime was white, which is a particular problem in Southern states.
- 6.An immediate end to racist gang enhancement laws targeting Black and Brown humans.
- 7.No denial of access to rehabilitation programs for imprisoned humans at their place of detention because of their label as a violent offender.
- 8.State prisons must be funded specifically to offer more rehabilitation services.
- 9.Reinstatement of Pell grant eligibility to prisoners in all US states and territories.
- 10.Recognition of voting rights for all confined citizens serving prison sentences, pretrial detainees and so-called "ex-felons." Their votes must be counted. Representation is demanded. All voices count!



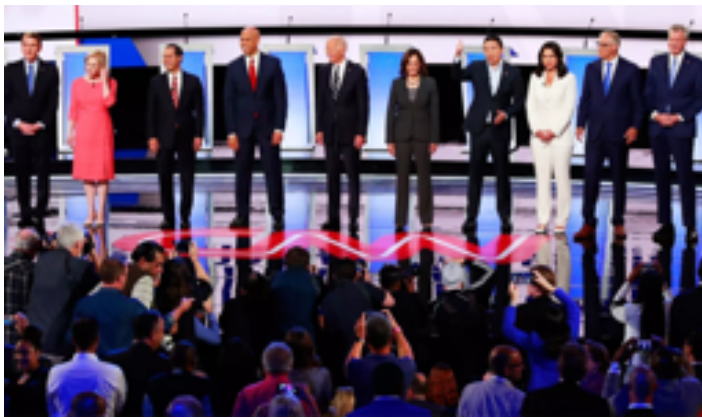
- California's ACA 6 is having a press conference in Sacramento's capitol building August 14th
- Illinois SB 2090 passed and is no in the incorporation stage
- The third round of presidential primary Democratic debates will occur at Texas Southern University in Houston hosted by ABC news

# MOVEMENT MOVES

PEOPLE | POSITIONS | POWER

## Democratic Debate Debrief Round 2: Biden Bombed and Harris Destroyed

by Amani Sawari August 2, 2019 | [www.sawarimi.org](http://www.sawarimi.org)



Day 2 candidates on the CNN Democratic Stage

Several of the candidates had inclusive opening statements that made me question their authenticity. Bill De Blasio (NY) wants to “make a country that puts the working people first”, Tulsi Gabbard (HA), stated that she intended to, “fight for the rights of all Americans”, Kristen Gillibrand (NY) emphasized, “When are civil rights convenient?” and Joe Biden (DE) shared that he wanted to “restore the soul of the nation” (which sounds more like Trump’s ‘Make America Great Again’ than I’m comfortable with). Julian Castro (TX) cleverly stated that there was nothing that this country that he would like to repeat. During this debate, rather than listening for catchy slogans, I was much more interested in seeing if any candidates would talk in depth about the topics that others are refusing to address.

### Republican Talking Points: Medicare for All

I was disappointed to see that healthcare took up most of the debate time on both days again. While it is an issue that needs to be addressed, each round of debates should have different talking points that would allow viewers to get a fuller view of where each candidate stands on a variety of issues. After going back and forth about small differences in their plans it was obvious to see that the Democratic party intends to provide every individual with affordable healthcare that would not rely so heavily on families and the employer. The options that the party offer are that individuals can either make the choice to keep what they’re provided by their employers with a public option for those who are uninsured or unsatisfied with their current insurance OR everyone would be insured by the public option. Both would be result in a higher tax rate for the middle class. While the Democrats argue for universal coverage through different methods, no one mentioned how incarcerated citizens would be covered. Their healthcare is monopolized by the private sector, leaving many with inadequate care.

### Criminal Justice System: To Transform or Ignore

Cory Booker led this discussion, taking his chance to attack Biden for his role saying, “You offer No redemption to the people who are in prison

right now.” I was proud of Booker for calling Biden out on not only what he failed to do in the past but what he where he is continuing to fail today. It doesn’t matter that he’s put a Criminal Justice Reform proposal out now. Biden has submitted a proposal in order to bolster his campaign, prior to this run for president he didn’t seek to make any positive changes to our nation’s prisons because that’s not what his track record shows. It’s interesting that he chose to do so before his visit to Detroit. On top of submitting an empty proposal, Biden tried to minimize his role in the violent crime bills that he called the ‘Biden bills’ in the 90s, saying, “that was a long long time ago” but what many people forget is that while his actions were a “long long time ago”, but there are people that have been in prison since for a long long time as a result of his actions. Booker’s right, Biden needs to offer redemption to those prisoners in order to have any saving grace in his campaign.

### “You Owe them [Prisoners] an Apology”

Biden was not the only one that was fired at for their role in mass incarceration. I couldn’t help but shout at my screen when Tulsi interrogated Harris about her failure to California’s incarcerated citizens during her time as Attorney General saying, “I want to bring the conversation back to the broken criminal justice system that is disproportionately negatively impacting Black and Brown people all across this country today. Senator Harris says that she’s proud of her record as a prosecutor and that she’ll be a prosecutor president but I’m deeply concerned about this record. There are too many examples to cite but she put over 1,500 people in jail for marijuana violations and then laughed about it when she was asked did she ever smoke marijuana,” to this the audience applauded as she continued, “she blocked evidence that would have freed an innocent man from death row until the courts forced her to do so. She kept people in prison beyond their sentences to use them as cheap labor for the state of California and she fought to keep cash bail system in place”. Harris could barely respond and her campaign took a heavy hit in Detroit where many families are impacted by such actions of prison and court officials. Unlike Biden, Harris did not offer any form of apology or regret. After the Debate #KamalaHarrisDestroyed flooded social media.

From 2011 to 2017 Harris had a huge amount of influence over California’s Corrections department and it still looks the same, if not worse after her reign. She had the opportunity and has proven that she is not committed to improving this system or any oppressive systems in this country. She is the president who will maintain the status quo and while Black in the face, like Obama, she isn’t looking to uplift the systems of oppression that have plagued Black people for centuries. She is a pawn being used by other more powerful forces to secure our vote and do nothing to actually earn it by serving the needs of our community.

### Reparations: To Settle or Ignore Mounting Debts to ADOS

Thankfully there was some more time given to the topic of reparations during this round of debates. Detroit would not have been satisfied if this topic wasn’t given an adequate amount of time. Williamson has taken the lead, making the case for reparations her primary issue. When asked the question of how she felt she qualified to calculate the amount of financial assistance to be payed, I was pleasantly surprised by her response, “it’s not \$500 billion of financial assistance...its payment of a debt that is owed. This is what reparations is” to which the crowd roared. She plainly explained that the 40 acres and a mule that was guaranteed to the formerly enslaved population would equate to hundreds of billions of dollars today and that is the debt that is still owed to African descendants of slaves (ADOS). No other candidates agreed that paying out reparations would be their prerogative during their presidency. Candidates Cory Booker (NJ) and Beto O’Rourke (TX) did agreed to a study of the case for reparations. Candidates Amy Klobuchar (MN), Andrew Yang (NY) and

Bernie Sanders (VT) advocate for bolstering the entire economy to benefit everyone with no plan to pay ADOS reparations.

At this point African decedents of slaves are unified in the fact that nothing less than exclusive individual payments would be a sufficient form of reparations. How else would we heal those deep wounds that Booker mentioned in his introductory statement without supporting economic mobility through paying reparations to the descendants of enslaved people? There is a festering dissatisfaction and decline in race relations as a result of this extraordinary debt and anything less than reparations would fall short in healing that.

The Focus Shouldn't Be on Trump Anymore...and never should've been Nearly every single candidate mentioned their goal is to defeat Trump. If we're tricked into thinking that the goal is just to beat Trump then after this election will think we would have won but that is only a trick. There's no way that Trump is going to be re-elected, he cannot even re-run according to new laws that require candidates to release their tax records and Trump has failed to do so. On top of the fact that he's not even eligible to run, he's created such a fool of himself that he's diminished his own following. Rather than focusing on beating Trump or finding a candidate that's better than Trump (which is a very low bar), we should be focused on a candidate whose committed to mending the systems that allowed for him to be elected.

Trump is being used as a scapegoat for issues that have always been prevalent in our society. Again the candidates addressed the topic of immigration, arguing that Trump is the cause for family separation and degraded incarceration conditions. Candidates disagreed over whether to decriminalize illegal border. Bennet and Biden argue that it's not criminalization that's the problem, its the president exploiting his power and both firmly believe that illegal crossings should remain a criminal offense. As a an advocate for decriminalization, I agree with Castro, Gillibrand and Harris changing illegal border crossing to a civil offense would protect families from separation.

We must remember that family separation has been happening in the United States as a form of not only punishment but also genocide since the birth of the nation. Family separation is a main characteristic of incarceration. Immigrants, without relatives, are forced to turn their children over to the abusive system, but family separation happens in the U.S. every day. Many of the candidates carried on about how terrible it was to have human beings in cages, treat innocent people like criminals and violate people's human rights. However, all of these things have been happening to our own citizens. How can we expect non-citizens to be treated any better?

### Final Thoughts

After this debate I still don't have a clear idea of what direction each candidate would take to transform our criminal justice system as president, but I do see what candidates are willing to scrutinize the issue. It's about time that Harris is called out by another candidate for her role in filling up prisons in California. I am surprised that candidate was Tulsi, rather than Cory Booker who has been the most vocal candidate about reform.

Right now incarcerated citizens and formerly incarcerated citizens who cannot vote are a massive population of millions people that are invisible in this election process. Candidates failure to address the needs of this population is appalling. We cannot be satisfied watching them talk around the issues that are most important to us. We need to hear their stances on the topics that weren't given adequate time in the previous debates. I want to see someone get bold and talk about voting rights, reparations and the criminal justice system with confidence on the debate stage.

These candidates missed an amazing opportunity to win over Detroit and potentially turn Michigan from red back to blue, by taking clear stances on the issues that Republicans refuse even exist. Detroit is a city that is hit hard by the lack of economic mobility. Reparations would surely boost the area's economy. Detroit is also a city where 64,000 people, including 1,600 children are incarcerated. Detroit is a place where thousands of residents have lost family and friends to the system. The people, especially in densely populated metropolitan areas like Detroit, needed to hear about the candidates positions on the issues that affect them the most and its unfortunate to see that opportunity was missed.—

# O'Rourke cancels prison tour, heads to Texas after shooting

Will Weissert | August 3, 2019 | [www.apnews.com](http://www.apnews.com)



Democratic presidential candidate and former Texas Rep. Beto O'Rourke speaks during a public employee union candidate forum Saturday 8/3/19 in Las Vegas. (AP photo/John Locher)

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democratic presidential candidate Beto O'Rourke canceled a visit to California's San Quentin State Prison and abruptly flew to his native El Paso, on Texas' border with Mexico, in the wake of a mass shooting there. A gunman opened fire Saturday in a shopping area that was crowded with people stocking up on back-to-school essentials. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said 20 people were killed and more than 20 others were wounded.

O'Rourke seemed slightly shaken as he appeared at a Las Vegas candidate forum after news of the shooting began to break. He said he had called his wife before taking the stage and that the shooting shatters "any illusion that we have that progress is inevitable" on tackling gun violence. The former congressman who represented El Paso until early January said he'd heard early reports that the shooter might have had a military-style weapon and that people need to "keep that (expletive) on the battlefield. Do not bring it into our communities."

"We have to find some reason for optimism and hope or else we consign ourselves to a future where nearly 40,000 people a year will lose their lives to gun violence and I cannot accept that," O'Rourke said. His voice cracking with emotion, O'Rourke later told reporters that he was heading home: "I'm going back there right now to be with my family and be with my hometown." He later recorded an online video from the Las Vegas airport: "I don't have words. This is not something that I can even fully believe has happened." His campaign canceled a town hall later Saturday in Minden, Nevada, as well as Monday's San Quentin stop.

O'Rourke had planned to take a tour led by inmates and meet with some prisoners who were close to finishing their sentences to discussing ways to improve the "re-entry" process into society and to combat recidivism. He had planned to conduct an interview with "Ear Hustle," a podcast produced by inmates inside the all-male prison that is California's oldest. President Barack Obama visited El Reno Federal Correctional Institution, a medium-security facility for male offenders in Oklahoma, in July 2015, becoming the first sitting U.S. president to set foot inside a federal prison.

"We have a broken criminal justice system in our country that helps to explain how we have the world's largest prison population, disproportionately comprised of people of color, though we know that people of all races use illegal drugs at roughly the same rate," O'Rourke said. "To reform this system, we need to listen to, learn from, and include the perspectives of people who have been locked up by it and locked out of opportunity because of it." O'Rourke wasn't the only Democratic presidential hopeful planning to visit a prison this week. During his own Nevada visit on Saturday, New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker was stopping by a women's state correctional facility. The issue of whether felons should be allowed to vote while imprisoned has roiled the packed field of Democrats vying for the chance to try to deny President Donald Trump a



second term. Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders said in April that they should, noting that voting is "inherent to our democracy — yes, even for terrible people." O'Rourke joined other candidates at the time in saying that he believed inmates imprisoned on nonviolent offenses should be allowed to

vote but that he didn't think inmates who committed violent crimes should be allowed to cast ballots. Mayor Pete Buttigieg of South Bend, Indiana, has said he more broadly opposes giving prisoners access to the ballot box.—

## LEGISLATION UPDATE

BILL | POLICY | CAMPAIGN

# Free the Vote Act, to Re-enfranchise Paroled Californians, Heads to the Assembly Floor

Amani Sawari August 5, 2019 | [www.sawarimi.org](http://www.sawarimi.org)



California has historically been a leader in reversing the symptoms of Jim Crow laws that continue to exist in the United States. These Laws restricted Blacks from securing housing and exercising their voting rights. The federal government turned a blind eye to the local and state laws that reinforced slave conditions on the newly freed population and many states took advantage, but in 1953 a California appeals court upheld the NAACP's finding that housing segregation violated the Fourteenth Amendment. The state of California stood behind the NAACP in protecting the rights of those being limited by oppressive laws. While the decision forced cities like San Francisco to abandon segregation, California's choice was not widely imitated. Nationwide segregation remained the rule. Now as nationwide felony disenfranchisement has become the status quo, will California take stance on the other side of the line?

### California Has Fallen Behind in Protecting Citizen's Voting Rights So far....

Now California has fallen behind in its position as a nationwide leader in protecting human rights. In the same way that the Fair Housing Act couldn't protect low income residents from gentrification, the Voting Rights Act is failing hundreds of thousands of citizens who are ineligible to vote due to felony disenfranchisement. Those things we fought so hard for in the 50s have evolved into the same issues with a different name. The legislation that was blanketed over us in the 60s can't protect us anymore now that new conditions have been set, barring people in prison and on parole from having any legislative voice to protect.

Organizations like Initiate Justice have identified the gap in legislation and

are working as apart of the Right2Vote Campaign to take the first step to restore the voting rights of people on parole. Currently there are 239,000 California residents that are locked up in state prisons, federal prisons and local jails. None of these residents have voting rights. In addition to these there are another 50,000 residents who have been released from prison that continue to be ineligible to vote while on parole. The disenfranchised population is not only grossly large but is also racially skewed.

### Skewed Incarceration Rates Thwart POC Political Power

California's incarceration rate is 581 for every 100,000 people. When we examine the specific incarceration rate based upon race the numbers get even more alarming. The rate is lower for whites at 453 and then nearly doubles for hispanics at 757. Then incarceration rate for Blacks is over 6x higher at 3,036! Because of this Blacks are overrepresented in the incarcerated population by 27%. Knowing that Black and Hispanic people are overrepresented in prison and much more likely to be incarcerated than that of whites, the impact of felony disenfranchisement dismantles the potential political power of these communities. A biased system leaves minorities' voices thwarted in state and federal elections and their policy decisions. Only a government that's unconcerned with the abusing rights of these populations would allow these felony disenfranchisement to exist.

### ACA 6 Works to Fix the Problem

Recognizing the persistent problem that felony disenfranchisement creates to silence hundreds of thousands and Californians, in 2018 Initiate Justice collected thousands of signatures in favor of the Voting Restoration and Democracy Act that would have restored the right to vote to 162,000 people in state prisons and on parole in California. While the Voting Restoration and Democracy Act did not receive the amount of signatures required to become law, IJ's work did educate the public and raise awareness about the severity of the issue of voting rights in California.

Now organizers are taking a different approach working through the legislature with ACA 6, Free the Vote Act. The bill was introduced in January by Assemblymember Kevin McCarty (D-Sacramento) and is now co-authored by Assemblymembers Carrillo (D-Los Angeles), Bonta (D-Oakland), Gipson (D-Carson), Gonzalez (D-San Diego), Kalra (D-San Jose), Kamlager-Dove (D-Los Angeles), Stone (D-Monterey Bay), Weber (D-San Diego), Mullin (D-South San Francisco), and Senator Wiener (D-San Francisco). Since being introduced the bill has passed through both the Assembly Elections Committee and the Assembly Appropriations Committee. Organizers look forward to the bill being favorably voted on on the Assembly Floor before it is moved through the Senate to be added to the 2020 election ballot in the Spring. Eventually the people will have the opportunity to play their role in re-enfranchising tens of thousands of California

### What Can You Do to Help before the Ballot Comes in 2020?

In order for this bill to continue to be successful as it moves through the legislative process, it is essential that the people stay involved in voicing their support of expanding the right to vote to include people on parole. Without ongoing support from the people, we could lose the opportunity to vote on this bill. This can be done through contacting your representative by writing a letter of support for ACA 6 and sending it through email or in the post. You can also contact your representative on social media, the majority of our legislatures are easy to reach out to on twitter.—

# U.S. Prisons Need a Board of Visitors



by Michelle Jones | August 8, 2019 | [www.medium.com](http://www.medium.com)

In early February, a scene that would warm the heart of any prison-reform advocate unfolded outside the Metropolitan Detention Center in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. Dozens of protesters, maybe hundreds, crowded the sidewalk outside, braving the cold and bearing signs that read “Enough,” “Cruelty,” and “You Are Loved.” Videos of incarcerated men banging on the windows of their cells trended online. Family members used megaphones to inquire if their jailed loved ones were okay. The response? A resounding “No!”

Local elected officials, including Rep. Jerrold Nadler, who heads the House Judiciary Committee, showed up to voice their outrage. Rep. Ocasio-Cortez fired off a tweet to a couple million followers, drawing national attention to the issue. Governor Andrew Cuomo called for a federal investigation, which is now being conducted by the Justice Department. A local advocacy group, Federal Defenders of New York, filed a lawsuit, and New York Attorney General Letitia James signed on. The indignation had been prompted by a story in *The New York Times* revealing the terrifying conditions inside the jail: Well over a thousand men had been locked in their cells for days, freezing in dark cages, without access to medications or hot water. Visits had been cancelled. It turned out that an electrical fire had led to the devastating power outage, but that was only the nominal cause of the crisis.

What really led to the week of excruciating torture for the men inside — and a primary contributing factor in innumerable less-celebrated cases of prison neglect, cruelty and violence nationwide — was invisibility. The suffering had been permitted, at least in part, because no one outside the bureaucracy of the Center’s operations knew about it. The fierce response demonstrated that, contrary to what one might expect, the public at large actually does care about the welfare of our incarcerated neighbors. But it also served as a critical reminder that in order for people to care, they first need to see.

It’s just about impossible to receive an undergraduate course in sociology without learning about the “panopticon,” the 19th century innovation in prison architecture that allows a single guard station to observe an entire floor of jail cells from a central hub (the idea was also floated for schools and hospitals). Of course, not everyone would be surveilled at all times, but even when prisoners weren’t being watched, the theory went, the possibility that they might be would shape their behavior. The incident at Metropolitan Department of Corrections, and the response to it, suggests that corrections officials might benefit from some observation as well. Because the abhorrent conditions at the MDC — and the horrific abuse and neglect uncovered there — are not anomalies. Across the country every day, men and women are suffering behind jail and prison walls, subject to maltreatment and abuse on a daily basis, away from the public eye. The attitude of corrections officials seems to be, “out of sight, out of mind.” And in the absence of media attention, the imperative to quickly correct problems is simply not present — contributing to a corrections culture that values punishment over rehabilitation and care.

An investigation into the Center’s actions is ongoing, but questions abound. If the public was never told what was happening at the Center

and officials felt no pressure to act, how long would the men under their supervision have suffered? And when facility officials can act to alleviate suffering and choose not to, at what point do they violate the Constitutional protection against cruel and unusual punishment? When does the treatment of defenseless incarcerated people amount to torture?

The St. Clair Correctional Facility, located in Springville, Alabama, is just one of the prisons investigated by the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) over the years. In 2014, the group published its findings in a sweeping report on the dire state of Alabama’s prisons: a litany of misconduct including corruption, the use of solitary confinement for protection, and particularly egregious acts of physical and sexual violence by corrections officers upon incarcerated men and women, as well as among the incarcerated population. Murder was common and went unchecked. EJI called St. Clair one of the deadliest prisons in the nation.

In 2014, EJI filed a class action lawsuit against St. Clair in federal court. The group won in 2017, and the prison agreed to implement reforms. But so far the prison has failed to do so. Even with EJI’s yearslong effort, what really brought the conditions inside St. Clair to light were the pictures — 2,000 of them, taken inside, presumably by the prison staff as evidence of infractions, and obtained by *The New York Times*. Recently, the paper published just a selection of them. “It is hard to imagine a cache of images less suitable for publication — they are full of nudity, indignity and gore,” reporter Shaila Dewan wrote. “It is also hard to imagine photographs that cry out more insistently to be seen.” In the end, the paper deemed just a handful worthy of publication, but even those shocked the conscience.

As with MDC, much of the problem inside Alabama’s prisons stems, at least in part, from secrecy. What happens in prisons is by design hidden from public view, and as a result, authorities act with impunity. Those of us who are familiar with the carceral state know that physical violence, sexual abuse and rape, inadequate mental health care, medical malpractice, denial of basic services, and the like have long been the norm at these secretive institutions. We know that state agencies charged with oversight often fail in their efforts, and that nonprofits and other groups that might prove more effective are routinely denied access. A growing public constituency believes, as I do, that the carceral system itself will always be evil and corrupt, generally doing more harm to society than good, but in lieu of the complete dismantling of an institution in which we trap millions of human beings and then taint them for life with criminality, a simple change could have a vastly positive impact on the situation.

Simply put, prisons are in desperate need of public oversight. An effective oversight mechanism should include the following elements:

- First, the prison system cannot effectively police itself. The watcher and the watched must be separate entities, answering to different institutions. So rather than being beholden to the state, an oversight board should be independent, drawn from the world of nonprofit, social-services organizations.

- Second, this oversight organization must have the right of entry into facilities, and enforcement power beyond mere advocacy and recommendations. It would adopt the best practices developed by the three external oversight organizations currently operating in the country: the John Howard Association in Illinois, The Pennsylvania Prison Society, and the Correctional Association of New York. Only these three are relatively free of institutional bias and provide a degree of meaningful oversight of the prison conditions in their states. That said, these groups are currently far from perfect and should be further empowered.

- Third, legislation should be introduced to establish a Board of Visitors, overseen and funded by a non-partisan public policy institute. Each board would be composed of a rotating non-partisan pool of non-governmental community, civic, and religious leaders and mental health professionals not affiliated with the DOC or its contractors. Such a board would be endowed with the power to approve or disapprove, prior to implementation, any resolution or directive of the departments of correction that directly affects incarcerated people. Contact information for the board would be made widely available to incarcerated men and women, and correspondence with the board would be privileged mail, and therefore confidential. Members of the board would receive no compensation beyond travel expenses.

- Fourth, board members would be directed to visit facilities at random and on an impromptu basis, and prison administrators would be compelled to facilitate these visits. Moreover, every individual board member should have the right of access to all facilities under their jurisdiction—even during facility lockdowns—allowing for unannounced visits day or night and free movement throughout the facilities. At the very least, each prison should be visited six times a year, with additional visits conducted as necessary based on reports from incarcerated people.

- Fifth, in order to deter corruption, board members would be assigned a numeric identification, which would stand as their only identifier when entering facilities, and in all communications with correctional officers, staff, and incarcerated men and women.

- Sixth, incarcerated individuals wishing to report incidents of violence and abuse must be able to do so without disclosing their identities to prison officials.

- Seventh, all reports would be distributed to prison officials, the Department of Corrections central office, and the relevant policy institute. The board would follow up on any allegations and be empowered to demand either immediate remediation or an action plan. Failure of a facility to act would trigger the launch of an investigation, with subpoena power.

- Eighth, the board would also be empowered to void or suspend contracts and/or withhold payment to private contractors that violate, endanger, and/or discriminate against incarcerated people. It must also have the authority to close unsafe or mismanaged departments, dorms, and facilities, and/or suspend executive staff for creating and/or sustaining unsafe, unhygienic, and inhumane living conditions.

- Ninth, in the further interest of transparency, board members would be authorized to highlight abuses through the media. If my imagined Board of Visitors had been active in New York or Alabama in recent years, composed of people from the impacted communities with the ability to immediately amplify the voices of those inside, maybe their suffering would have been minimized.

I am under no illusion that violence and mistreatment will ever be entirely eradicated under the carceral system as currently conceived, but I do believe that by breaking down the wall of secrecy and letting the light of public attention shine in those cordoned off spaces, improvements can be made that will help ensure the safety of everyone living under the custody — and the care — of the state until the system itself is dismantled.

—  
Michelle Jones is a third-year doctoral student in the American Studies program at New York University.



## Chicken Coming Home to Roost

by Jeremy Busby. | Bill Clements Unit | Texas DOC



Robert Mueller (left) questions Donald Trump (right) during investigation

Turn your T.V. on Fox News Channel. Listen to any conservative talk radio program. Within a few minutes I'm sure you will hear a political pundit excoriate the Russian investigation that is being conducted by special prosecutor Robert Muller. Among the numerous complaints that are often highlighted is the indictment of Trump's associates on unrelated criminal charges. They moan this tactic of a prosecutor using criminal charges to pressure a witness into cooperation.

Well, too bad. As my grandmother would always say, "it is what it is" or in the words of the legendary civil rights activists Malcolm X, "this is the case where the chicken has finally come to roost."

For decades in this country prosecutors have utilized this nefarious practice to put away people they think are bad. Former FBI director J. Edgar Hoover was notorious for charging people with frivolous crimes to pressure them to turn into FBI informants. The truth and/or validity of these informants' information matter none, the only goal was to obtain information that could result in someone being put away. And, most notably was the absence of the public outcry by the Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity-types. Now that one of their own is being subject to cruel practice, America we have a problem.

Quite frankly, America has been having a problem. Many criminal defendants-- including myself --have spent decades in prison for crimes that they didn't commit as a result of information provided by police jailhouse informants. Charged with murdering a guy that I didn't even know, I was wrongfully convicted from the testimony of three jailhouse informants. There was no physical evidence or motive offered by the state prosecutors. Conversely, there exists multiple elements that supports that these jailhouse informants were manufactured completely by the prosecution itself. Over the past two decades, I've personally petition conservative law-makers and media outlets, and to never receive a response.

The people of Texas recently were directly exposed to the ills of this practice with the exoneration of John Nolley. Falsely accused of murdering his good friend, Nolley spent 19 years in prison after being convicted by the false testimony of two jailhouse informants. One of the informants what's facing a prison sentence of 25 to 99, however after providing the testimony that led to Nolley's conviction, the jailhouse informant was sentenced to 10 years probation. Had it not been for the advent of DNA testing-- which ultimately cleared Nolley-- he would still be sitting in a prison cell.



John Nolly (center) with his attorneys Nina Morrison (left) and Reagan Wynn (right). Photo by Ron Jenkins.



Unlike Nolley, most exoneration efforts cannot be obtained through DNA testing. In most cases there was no physical evidence collected from the crime scene, so there is no evidence available for DNA testing. As a result, innocent people are dwelling in prison because of the unethical act of a perfidious prosecutor. So when one listens to the rage that is being expatiated at special counsel Mueller for his continuation of this practice, you cannot help but ask yourself, "where was this rage for the people like John Nolley and all of the lesser-known defendants that have been victimized by the sun just practice?"

In the words of civil rights icon Martin Luther King jr. "An Injustice anywhere is an injustice everywhere."

Jeremy Busby is a former staff writer for the Texas department of Criminal Justice prison newspaper the e c h o he is a contributing writer for various criminal justice outlets. --

#### Mailing Info

Jeremy Busby #881193  
Bill Clements Unit  
9601 Spur 591  
Amarillo, TX 79107

## Comic Strip

by Willie Worley Jr. | Bertie Correctional Institution



Source: <http://www.realcostofprisons.org/comix/worley>

## Black August Event Calendar



Incarcerated supporters can participate in the Black August Social Media Campaign's

#NewSuffrageMvmt by submitting questions [from your perspective to the public] for the Wednesday Twitterchats, submitting artwork for the public art gallery that will be displayed in Detroit, MI, encouraging friends and family to attend events and by incorporating the five tenets of the Black August Program into their month.



## Call for Content

In addition to publishing content raising awareness about the Right2Vote Campaign and its initiatives, the Right2Vote Report accepts work from prisoners in the form of articles, art and poetry as well as the contribution of stamps. We also work with other nonprofits and organizers to amplify your voices. This publication and its campaign are about *you* and our most meaningful contributions come from the inside. For readers interested in submitting their work: typed and printed can be sent to the return address or emailed to: [amanisawari@gmail.com](mailto:amanisawari@gmail.com). Please write your address onto the back of your submission.

#### Prison Mental Health/Environmental Awareness Art Gallery

This month we want to draw attention to health and environmental concerns in our Understanding that hHealthcare is more than prevention of sickness, it includes physical, mental, emotional and environmental well being; we want to shine a light on the prison's failure to maintain a healthy environment for its residents and staff.. Many people fail to understand how violent and unhealthy prisons are because we don't have a full understanding of what health or environmental concerns exist inside beyond insufficient medical care. We are looking for artwork that helps to tell the story behind the experience of maintaining ones emotional and mental health while in prison for an art gallery in its early stages of planning. We plan on display artwork in Michigan at a Public Art Gallery.

#### University of Chicago Student seeks Interviews

Taylor Fox is a college senior studying Political Science at the University of Chicago. She is conducting research on contemporary U.S. prison labor struggles and is hoping to interview formerly incarcerated folks involved with this work. Taylor started this project because she thinks in order to envision a world without prisons, we must envision a world without slavery. She knows she can't do this topic justice without centering the voices of people most impacted and involved.

Please contact her at (631) 806-8170 or [taylorfox@uchicago.edu](mailto:taylorfox@uchicago.edu) if you're interested in participating in an approximately one hour interview. And if you have any friends who organize or struggle against prison labor (or have at some point), she would love to talk with them too. Feel free to reach out to Taylor with and questions (she'd love to talk about this project more!) at the contact information listed above.

Sawarimi does not provide legal services, but happily forwards requests for legal representation to partners at the National Lawyers' Guild. Sawarimi is a platform of expression and empowerment for disenfranchised and marginalized groups, especially members of the African diaspora. Amani Sawari is a writer, founder of Sawarimi and SawarimiMedia, spokesperson for Jailhouse Lawyers Speak and National Coordinator of their Right2Vote Campaign with the support of the Roddenberry Foundation. Download and print issues of the Right2Vote Report for distribution at <http://sawarimi.org/right2vote-report>

**Sawari Media**  
**P.O. Box #2278**  
**Detroit, Michigan 48202**

# National Progress to Ending Felony Disenfranchisement

